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TAGS: [PREL](#) [IS](#) [KPAL](#) [IR](#) [FR](#)  
SUBJECT: FM LIVNI VISIT REINFORCES UPSWING IN  
FRENCH-ISRAELI RELATIONS

Classified By: Political Minister-Counselor Josiah Rosenblatt, reasons  
1.4 (b) and (d).

11. (C) Summary: Israel embassy contacts stressed positive atmospherics during FM Livni's March 1 meetings with French PM Villepin and FM Douste-Blazy. Israeli contacts were struck by the degree to which Livni found common ground with French officials, Villepin in particular, despite differences on issues such as Hamas, PA President Mahmoud Abbas, and Hizballah. In a sign of improving GoI-GOF ties, a first-ever Israel visit by the French MFA Political Director will take place March 16, and Villepin accepted Livni's invitation to visit Israel at a later, unspecified date. On Hamas, Villepin reiterated GoF insistence on the Quartet conditions, while Douste-Blazy discussed the implications of a Hamas-led PA on international assistance. On Iran, Israel embassy contacts commented that Douste-Blazy was tougher than Villepin, and that the French FM described Iran as an "imminent danger." Livni also praised French officials for GoF efforts to combat anti-Semitism, and paid a private visit to the family of Ilan Halimi, a Jewish Frenchman whose brutal kidnapping/murder was believed to be motivated by anti-Semitism. End summary.

VILLEPIN: HAMAS, IRAN  
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12. (C) During a March 3 discussion with poloff, Israeli Embassy Political Counselor Ella Aphek described Israeli FM Tzipi Livni as warmly received by FM Douste-Blazy and PM Villepin during meetings in Paris March 1. Aphek described the hour-long Villepin meeting as noteworthy not so much for what was said, but for the eagerness shown by the French PM in receiving the Israeli FM. Aphek said it was "unbelievable" how well the two officials got along, and expressed surprise that Villepin didn't raise usual topics of contention, such as the separation barrier and settlements. Instead, Villepin described a positive shift in French public opinion towards Israel, which the French people viewed as giving up ideology and moving forward in the wake of Gaza withdrawal, while the other side was regressing. On Hamas, Villepin reiterated French insistence on three conditions (renunciation of violence, recognition of Israel, recognition of past PLO-Israel agreements), but suggested that Hamas would only implement the conditions gradually. On Iran, Villepin stressed the need to be careful and avoid creating an "amalgam" of difficult issues -- including Syria, Iraq, Iran, and Hamas -- concluding that we should take our time on Iran. Villepin also sought Livni's views on Syria, which Aphek noted will be among the topics of discussion at a March 16 visit by MFA Political Director Stanislas de Laboulaye to Israel, the first such visit under a France-Israel strategic dialogue launched in 2003. (Note: Laboulaye will also be accompanied by MFA A/S-equivalent for Middle East/North Africa Jean-Francois Thibault and MFA IO A/S-equivalent

Sylvie Bermann. End note.) Livni, for her part, invited Villepin to Israel, an invitation which he accepted readily, though no timing is set.

DOUSTE-BLAZY: IRAN, HAMAS, ABBAS, HIZBALLAH

13. (C) Apek described FM Douste-Blazy as tougher than Villepin on Iran; rather than advocate a gradualist approach, the French FM spoke of an "imminent danger" posed by the Iranian nuclear program and stressed that the crisis "could not go on." Douste-Blazy also expressed doubt in Russian negotiating efforts, but concluded that it would serve to show that all diplomatic efforts had been exhausted before UNSC referral. On Hamas, Douste-Blazy agreed on the need to remain firm on the Quartet principles while looking for ways to move Hamas towards gradual compliance. Apek reported that Livni responded by citing the example of Hizballah, for which political integration had produced no change. Apek reported a similar GoF-GoI divergence on PA President Abbas, whom Livni described in press remarks as a "fig leaf" for Hamas. Livni told Douste-Blazy that the GoF could continue to "kid itself" about Abbas, or be firm and uncompromising on the Quartet conditions.

ANTI-SEMITISM, HALIMI MURDER

14. (C) Apek confirmed that prior to Livni's March 2 departure, she paid a discreet condolence call on the family of Ilan Halimi, a Jewish cellphone vendor whose brutal kidnapping/murder prompted widespread public outcry and calls for renewed efforts to combat anti-Semitism in France. Apek concluded that the although Halimi murder had generated shock in Israel, unlike past incidents, it had not prompted

significant criticism of the French government, which was now viewed in Israel as working effectively to fight anti-Semitism in France. During both the Villepin and Douste-Blazy meetings, she noted, Livni praised GoF efforts to combat anti-Semitism.

15. (C) COMMENT: Apek speculated that PM Villepin's effort to build rapport with FM Livni was motivated by his desire to overcome the perception in Israel that he is anti-Semitic, due to his longtime association with traditional, "pro-Arab" French foreign policies. We wonder if Villepin's eagerness was driven more by a desire to highlight his foreign policy credentials, in the wake of his declining domestic poll numbers and flagging campaign to beat out Interior Minister Nicolas Sarkozy as the center-right party candidate in the 2007 presidential elections. We also suspect that the GoF's non-confrontational approach for Livni was intended to avoid undermining prospects for Kadima in Israel's March 28 legislative elections. End comment.

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Stapleton